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ABSTRACT

Drawing on international studies concerning leisure attitudes, media consumption, and parental impact on the television viewing decisions of 4- to 14-year olds, this paper focuses on the importance of developing a coherent media education policy for pre- and primary-school children, parents, elementary school teachers, and television station program directors and supervisors, as a means to control the impact of media consumption (i.e., television viewing) on young children. Background information on the concept of media education and its necessity in the present social and technological environment is presented, the importance of media consumption in the lives of young children is briefly discussed, and the important areas for the development of media education programs are summarized. Suggestions for a media education policy are outlined. Accompanying the text are five data tables on media consumption patterns among German and Swiss youth and a 21-item reference list. (Author/JL)

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Dimensions of a Policy for Media Education
from the Perspective of tv-Consumption

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I. Background Information about Media Education

Today we are faced with a permanently increasing rate of change in environment, society and "Zeitgeist". Means of data processing and information systems have highly influenced this development. At present the process of change has arrived at a complexity which makes it more and more difficult for institutions and experts to supervise and control these developments.¹⁾

It has not sufficiently been reflected that the mass media are a dependent variable of social, technological and economic developments (cf. e.g. feed back through population research, the fore-running of 'hard-ware' and the economy of mass production). However, on the other hand the mass media themselves are agencies which transform the structures of consciousness and impel social change.

This dynamic development of all spheres of life and the dialectics of social and media change are reflected only hesitatingly and with considerable time lag by educational institutions. They cause unconditional adaptation for the majority of the adults and parents, they drive many young people into apathy or rebellion and they are responsible for a pre-conscious adjustment of children.

The consequences for a concept of media education could be:

- Media education has to reflect the origin as well as the interrelationship of the media and of media education with society,²⁾ since the development of the media has confronted us with new social and psychic phenomena;
- Media education should not focus in a one dimensional way on the recipient (psycho-logical approach), on the media (technological approach) or on structures of communication (system theory, cybernetic approach). Instead it has to be perceived as part of a comprehensive environmental and social education, similar to the current conceptual development of political, health and vocational education.³⁾
- Media education should first of all focus on further education for parents, teachers and programme editors, since socialisation in the family has a decisive impact, since school proved to be fairly helpless with regard to electronic developments and visual language and since programme editors have tended to shift the responsibility for media consumption to the consumer.

II. The Importance of Media Consumption and Media Development

In the area of media consumption an euphoric over-estimation of the educational impact of television (which has e.g. lead to the rapid expansion of children's programmes) has been followed by a stagnant or even decreasing degree of watching tv (Tab. I).⁴⁾ Obviously the desire for self-activation and direct social contacts has been intensified (Tab. II).⁵⁾

With regard to age specific media consumption it can be reported: the younger the children, the stronger their preference for the totality of tv-experience, whereby primary and second-hand experiences are interlinked and emotional strain is likely to occur. Younger school children (6 - 13) appreciate mainly the entertaining and much less the stimulating and informative function of tv. - Even with 15 year olds movies, detective stories and music programmes are far more popular than youth programmes, not to mention study programmes and political information (Tab. III).⁶⁾ - It is not before the following years that interest in political and informative programmes increases, at an age where media consumption itself decreases to the advantage of the appreciation of music, reading and hobbies (Tab. IV a + b).⁷⁾

A discussion of media consumption has to consider, to which degree parents have control over their children's media behaviour. Obviously children from lower social classes and from homes with high parental tv-consumption are more 'independent' in their decisions, and from late primary education onwards all children are granted more freedom in their decisions (Tab. V).⁸⁾ Consequently children of post-primary age are widely independent in their decisions on children and youth programmes, and 12 - 14 year olds are increasingly granted freedom of choice with regard to the total programme before 8 p.m.

Hence the following conclusions can be drawn for media education:

- Media education should give special consideration to the educators of young children (parents, nursery school and primary school teachers), since this is the age when attitudes towards consumption are developed and when the child can hardly escape the totality of tv-experience. Furthermore parents are initially deeply involved in their children's decision-making about watching tv, but they

grant them an increasing competence to make their own programme decisions from the years of primary education onwards. 9)

- Furthermore it is apparent from the media consumption and programme decisions of youth that media education has to focus on young people's desire for entertainment. And contrary to common practice it should not be restricted to the development of strategies for decision making and the specification of educational guidelines.
- In addition broadcasting systems should be more intensively involved in the responsibilities of media education since children and youngsters may watch youth programmes without prior parental permission but tend to reject just these programmes.

Finally media education has not only to consider media consumption but also media development. Otherwise its time lag with regard to technological development and international marketing strategies would probably increase. Therefore, media education can no longer ignore that new opportunities for consumption, and markets for entertainment have been introduced through cable tv,¹⁰⁾ or video-cassettes on the one side, and by tv- and computerised games on the other. Their impact on youth and families can hardly be overestimated.

- Consequently media education has to observe national and international developments of media and their utilization more closely in order to be in a position for up to date work and guidance for further development. The question however, to what degree media education can change media behaviour once acquired, has not adequately been researched. 11)

III. Trends for Further Developments:

Generally schools have been overburdened with the solution of social problems (e.g. introduction of health, family and environmental education). Typically, after the establishment of school experiments and the discussion about the necessity of new subjects or instructional principles, curricula have mainly been developed for school leavers in their final grades, and teachers have to transform them into practice without further training. Finally home factors were discovered to be dominant

for learning achievement, like it had been demonstrated through large scale research projects for the traditional subjects (e.g. IEA).¹²⁾

The practical consequences of these findings -- as listed below -- have many times been delineated but rarely applied in practice. They should also serve as an orientation mark for media education:

Educational reform has to start with parents and teachers, it has to be designed as a continuous process from preschool and primary education onwards (e.g. prevocational, sexual and political education) and it has to provide opportunities for experiential learning beyond the acquisition of knowledge.¹³⁾

Therefore it seems to be necessary for media education to analyse and systematize projects in the following fields, to interrelate them in the way of compound systems and try to examine their efficiency:

- Parent education.
- Further education for teachers in nursery and school education.
- Experiential media education in primary schools.

Parent Education:

Since educational institutions and media expect the parents to educate the children for an adequate use of media, support is needed for them, so that cope more effectively with the following problems:

- Parents and children can participate through the media in the same 'processing' of reality, but they are equipped with quantitatively as well as qualitatively different primary experiences.
- There are no simple criteria for a sensible media consumption, and furthermore, particular problems of the family often become vital in the process of decision making with regard to media consumption.
- All problems of media education imply questions of parental self-education.

Aspects of such a parent education are offered through the school, family education and the media. In schools parent conferences and practical projects on media could initiate support, provided a community and experiential orientation is chosen and the teachers possess relevant competence with regard to media. - In family education aspects of media consumption are touched upon in various ways, in addition educational films are used, ^{to}problematize family situations, but hardly ever the aims and possibilities of a media education are emphasized (although a limited number of practical suggestions is available).¹⁴⁾ For the media it has been demonstrated that they are competent in parent education through an inter-system cooperation of broadcasting corporations and institutions of adult^{education}.¹⁵⁾ However, in West Germany there are only few programmes which are especially concerned with media education, whereas in Switzerland at least a tv-series is prepared on this topic.¹⁶⁾

Altogether there is quite a chance to reach parents (as well as youth and education) through media-compound-systems and to support their competence in media education. But in order to change attitudes - which is required - at least a series of telecasts is needed which are followed up in discussions of primary groups.

Further Education for Nursery and Primary School Teachers:

While in the past decade the cooperation between home and school has been intensified, it has not been adequately been realised, that the hidden curriculum of television is a crucial third factor in the education and socialization process of children.¹⁷⁾ Therefore teachers are in need of further education with regard to media consumption:

- so that their institutional beliefs or conventions and their ignorance of children's media behaviour do not stand in the way of an education in agreement with the children's life reality;
- so that they can adequately deal with the children's expectations, knowledge, and strains which are inspired by the totality of tv experience, by its density of action and information, and by its possibility for entertainment;

- so that they utilize media: to conform with children's needs and school topics, and initiate self-guidance in the use of media, since children are expected to make their own programme-decisions in the final years of primary school.¹⁸⁾

At present further education for these educators is primarily offered in terms of on-time-meetings or short seminars. Less often media education is initiated through school projects for the production of movies. Rarely it results from participation in multi-media compound systems.

Traditional courses in further education have mainly served the purpose to develop criteria for an analysis of media programmes and structures, to discuss aims of media education and to elaborate on didactic strategies. They rarely include instructional experiences and experimentation with school specific transformations of content.

No less important for the discussion of media in further education is the experience within school projects.¹⁹⁾ Numerous projects in day care centres and schools demonstrate the advantages for media education, if a feedback is established between theory and practice on several levels, as e.g.: between the experiences of teachers and students, between expectations of recipients and interests of producers, or between portrayed and experienced reality. This not only allows teachers but also children a better understanding of the language of media, and it offers a good opportunity for active involvement in the problems of media control. - Above all, through these activities a long range dialogic communication can be initiated, between larger groups of the public and the mass media.²⁰⁾ But presently there is no adequate exchange of information and experience on such projects.

These difficulties could probably be reduced, if more educators would participate in multi-media compound systems. Furthermore such systems offer particular opportunities for media education, since they demand mutual understanding and complimentary assistance.²¹⁾

IV. Suggestions for policy in media education:

1. Media education should particularly be concerned with primary school children on the one hand and their parents and teachers on the other.
2. Research is urgently needed, which analyses the effects of different strategies and didactics of media education and which interrelates media education with education for leisure.
3. Wherever broadcasting is state-controlled or an institution of public law, it should be brought home to the supervisory boards, that it is their responsibility to participate in - and to set guidelines for media education.

TAB. I a

Development of daily tv consumption (M - Su)
for children up to age 13 in minutes
(on the basis of the yearly average for all
tv-channels)

Age	1976	1977	1978	1979
3 - 7	60	59	50	45
8 -13	95	88	87	82

TAB. I b

Consumption of different media per day
(in minutes; Switzerland)

	4 - 5 years	6 - 7 years	8 - 9 years	10-11 years	12-14 years
tv	60	71	84	97	<u>109</u>
radio	34	32	22	31	<u>42</u>
cassettes/ records	19	24	19	18	<u>40</u>

TAB. II

Change of behaviour in particular dimensions of life and areas of consumption		a Present situation	b Intensification in the next 2 years	c Taking up new activities	Index (b+c in relation to a = 100 %)
- spend additional time for personal/private interests		59 %	17 %	7 %	41 %
- pursue further education and acquire knowledge		59 %	24 %	2 %	44 %
- create something with ones own hands		75 %	24 %	2 %	35 %
MEDIA	- read a book	48 %	11 %	7 %	38 %
	- read a magazine	54 %	5 %	3 %	15 %
	- read a newspaper	58 %	4 %	2 %	10 %
	- listen to the radio	62 %	4 %	3 %	11 %
	- watch tv	73 %	5 %	2 %	10 %
	- go to movies	28 %	6 %	9 %	53 %
SOCIAL	- make contacts - get to know people	29 %	7 %	11 %	62 %
CONTACTS	- be with friends (in private circles)	77 %	22 %	6 %	36 %

Tendency: to emphasize personal priorities, strong desire for social contact, but no appreciable intensification of media consumption.

TAB. III

Type of programme	15 year old Munich youth		Berlin youth	
	Mean	Variance	Preference	
Movies	1.85	.37	74 %	
Detective stories, Western movies	1.73	.50	Detective stories	80 %
			Western	65 %
Music programmes	1.63	.62	Hitparade	59 %
Youth programmes	1.34	.61		36 %
Study programmes	1.01	.62		-
News and political features	.96	.68	Political failures	31 %

TAB. IV a

Rank Order of Leisure Time Interests		
Monday - Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1. being with friends	1. being with friends	1. being with friends
2. <u>listening to music</u>	2. <u>listening to music</u>	2. <u>watching tv</u>
3. reading	3. <u>watching tv</u>	3. strolling/hiking
4. persuing hobbies	4. persuing hobbies	4. <u>listening to music</u>
5. <u>watching tv</u>	5. geing to disco	5. persuing hobbies
6. persuing further education	6. reading	6. reading
7.	7.	7.

TAB. IV b

Favourite Leisure Time Activities according to Age Groups (Switzerland)

	4 - 5 years	6 - 7 years	8 - 9 years	10-11 years	12-14 years
Playing with other children	67,4%	64,1%	68,5%	69,6%	52,9%
Drawing, Painting	<u>40,1%</u>	34,1%	23,4%	15,1%	9,9%
<u>Watching tv</u>	25,6%	23,4%	<u>27,2%</u>	24,9%	23,0%
Playing by oneself	23,6%	16,6%	11,0%	10,7%	7,5%
<u>Listening to Radio</u>	4,8%	4,1%	5,2%	6,3%	14,7%
Listening to Records/ Cassettes	4,4%	7,7%	11,1%	14,0%	<u>22,9%</u>
Reading	3,8%	5,5%	13,4%	22,7%	<u>29,9%</u>

TAB . V

Parental Control over Children's
tv-Consumption in Switzerland

	4 - 5 years	6 - 7 years	8 - 9 years	11-11 years	12-14 years
- is not required to ask	6,0%	9,0%	10,1%	10,5%	<u>24,2%</u>
- has to ask sometimes	29,0%	37,7%	<u>55,9%</u>	56,0%	56,9%
- has always to ask	<u>60,3%</u>	49,1%	34,0%	23,7%	14,8%

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